

Smoking and Health

The new "Smoking and Health. A Report of the Surgeon General" provides overwhelming evidence connecting cigarette smoking with disabling and fatal diseases. It reflects the results of 30,000 studies undertaken since the original report was issued in 1964. These studies clearly illustrate that cigarette smoking is far more dangerous to health than we believed 15 years ago.

The new report is virtually an encyclopedia of current knowledge about the many aspects of smoking, including the health consequences, the behavioral aspects, and education and prevention efforts. It represents extensive work by scientists both within the Public Health Service and in the private sector.

A year after the original report, all cigarette packs and print advertising were required to bear the statement: "Caution, cigarette smoking *may be* hazardous to your health." In 1970, this was changed to read: "Warning: the Surgeon General *has determined* that cigarette smoking is dangerous to your health." In the ensuing years, we have learned much more about these dangers, and we have learned much more about who in our population is at a very high risk to the hazards of cigarette smoking.

As a pediatrician, I am particularly concerned about the evidence in the new report regarding the dangers to the fetus of a pregnant woman who smokes. The pregnant woman who smokes runs the risk of retarding the growth rate of the fetus. The pregnant smoker is more likely to have a spontaneous abortion. The children of women who smoke are more likely to have measurable deficiencies in physical growth and intellectual development. I cannot urge strongly enough that pregnant women—in order to protect their unborn—should refrain from smoking.

For women smokers who use oral contraceptives containing estrogen, the report cautions that they run 10 times the risk of having a heart attack than women who do not smoke and who do not take such contraceptives.

Children and teenagers, according to the report, are experimenting with smoking at an earlier age than ever before. I should like to caution young people that the mortality rates from all causes are significantly higher among those who begin smoking early. In addition, children and teenagers who smoke should take advantage of the fact that they are at a point in life when quitting is relatively easy. However, the longer one smokes and the older one gets, the more difficult it is to break from an addictive-like pattern such as smoking.

The report makes clear that if we are going to help people give up the smoking habit or not begin at all, we must accelerate our behavioral research in this area, which we are doing. The report also notes that whenever the dangers of smoking have been given ample attention, such as during the period when anti-smoking messages were frequently run on television, cigarette consumption has dropped. We must and we will increase our information and education activities in this regard, especially in light of the massive advertising conducted by the tobacco industry.

The decision to smoke or not is a very personal one that can only be made by each individual. Before making that decision, however, each individual should at least become aware of the information in this report. Any decision involving serious risks should not be made without fully understanding what those risks represent. In issuing the 15th anniversary Surgeon General's Report on Smoking and Health, the Public Health Service is taking a major step in that direction.

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